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ABSTRACT

The brochure offers guidelines on the everyday care and handling of infants with low muscle tone, in order that positioning, carrying, and other daily activities can be done in ways that will enhance the development of the child and prevent abnormal postures and patterns of movement. Proper positioning in the prone, supine, side lying, and sitting positions can help prevent abnormal postures and give the infant the opportunity to strengthen different groups of muscles. Carrying involves providing adequate support for head and trunk. Other routine daily activities which provide opportunities to improve the child's strength and development occur during dressing, feeding, and bathing. (JDD)

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Positioning and Care of the Low-Tone Child

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Introduction

Characteristically, children with low muscle tone feel limp and heavy when held. It is hard for them to move and play and they appear passive and unmotivated. In truth, they are choosing not to play because they find it too difficult to move.

This brochure offers guidelines to parents and caretakers on the everyday care and handling of a young child with low muscle tone. Positioning, carrying, and other daily activities can be done in ways that will enhance the development of the child, as well as help prevent abnormal postures and patterns of movement.

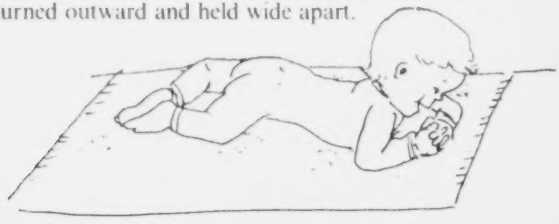
The suggestions given are primarily for the infant in the 0 to 12-month age range of motor development and should be used in conjunction with an early intervention therapy program that addresses the child's special needs.

Positioning

Proper positioning helps prevent abnormal postures and is also beneficial because it gives the infant the opportunity to strengthen different groups of muscles.

Lying on Stomach (Prone)

Typical posture of the low-tone child. The arms are wide apart and the chest and stomach rest on the floor. The legs are turned outward and held wide apart.



The child should spend a portion of every day lying prone on the stomach. This position helps to develop the muscles in the back of the neck and along the spine. It also helps to develop strength in the arms and shoulders as the child pushes up to lift head and look around.

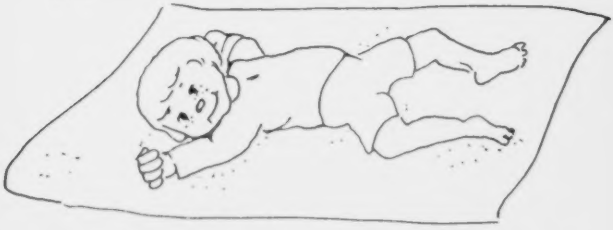
Place a bolster (tightly rolled blanket, towel, or pillow) under the chest while the arms are forward to encourage lifting of the head as well as promote weight bearing on the forearms or hands.

Hold and shake a toy in front to encourage lifting of the head.

Move a bright colored toy from side to side to encourage head turning.

Lying on Back (Supine)

Typical posture includes the arms away from the body with the legs wide apart and rolled out. The head is often tipped back with the chin up. In this position the child has difficulty bringing hands together or lifting legs.



In the early months, before a child can roll, this position should be used as little as possible. When used, effort should be made to keep the chin tucked and to bring the arms forward in front of the body.

Place a small pillow or foam wedge under the child's head to keep the chin tucked.

Place small rolls behind each shoulder and along the side of each leg to help keep child's arms forward and the legs in alignment.

Place a wedge under the child's hips to help bring the feet toward the hands and mouth.

Suspend or hold toys above child's chest to encourage bringing the hands forward and together in front of the body.

Move bright colored objects side to side to develop head turning.

Side Lying

Side lying is an excellent position for the child. It helps to keep the hands together in front of the body, encourages chin tucking, and prevents the legs from spreading apart.

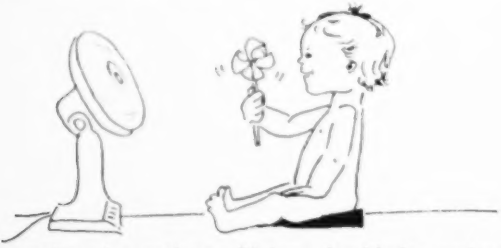
Pillows, foam, sandbags, or a rolled blanket may be necessary to prevent the child from rolling back. Be sure the support extends to the back of the head to keep the chin tucked.

Sitting

Typical sitting posture includes a rounded back with the legs wide apart and rolled outward. The child's head may drop forward. Attempts to hold the head up are usually done by lifting the shoulders forward and up.

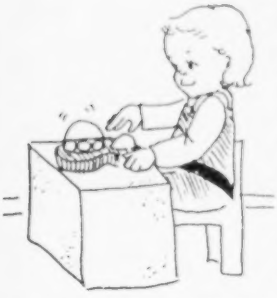
In the early stages of sitting, use supports (such as the inside corner of an easy chair or sofa) to help maintain the position and promote symmetry of the body. Use pillows or rolls for additional trunk support.

When the child is able to sit with little or no support, a variety of positions should be used.



Use a small wedge, such as a 2" three-ring binder, under the bottom to encourage the child to lift trunk and sit erect.

Side sitting is a good position for play as it helps child keep the legs together. Give support to the trunk by using a ball or a bolster.



Chair or bench sitting is often preferred over floor sitting as it promotes better balance and good alignment of the head and trunk, making it easier for the child to maintain a more erect posture.

The feet must rest on the floor to give the child a sense of security and help maintain balance. Use rolls on the outside of each leg to help keep them together. Use a safety belt around the hips to help keep the bottom from sliding forward.

Place a small table in front for play. A cardboard box turned upside down with a cutout for the legs works well.

Use highchairs for feeding as soon as good head control is developed. Be sure the child is sitting erect with the bottom well back into the seat; a seat belt around the hips will prevent sliding forward. Use rolls on each side of the child's legs to keep them in alignment.

Modify an infant seat or car seat with supports to keep the child in good alignment. Small rolls behind each shoulder will place the arms in front of the body. There are many commercially available seat inserts (Baby Head Support and Baby's Cloud, for example) that provide support to the head and trunk.

If feeding the child in the infant seat, adjust the angle so that the child is sitting almost erect.

Carrying

Generally, the child will need slightly more support for head and trunk; this varies from child to child and it is important to select carrying positions that encourage the development of strength in the neck and upper body. Additional incentive to work can be given by gently jiggling or bouncing.

Support the child firmly at the hips, keeping the knees together. Raising or lowering the child in relation to your body varies the amount and kind of support needed. Lowering the child gives more support to the head and trunk while raising the child encourages the use of neck and trunk muscles.

Applying gentle pressure into the bottom arm toward the shoulder provides strengthening around the shoulder and promotes lifting of the head.

This position encourages lifting of the head. Additional support can be given to the head if necessary.

Dressing, Feeding, and Bathing

Routine daily activities provide great opportunities to improve the child's strength and development. While dressing, feeding, or bathing the child, always be thinking of ways to encourage more active work.

Dressing

While dressing the child, work on developing arm and leg strength as well as improving trunk balance. When placing the arms or legs into clothing, try pushing rather than pulling and use small taps on the arm or leg to get the child to finish the motion alone.

Have the child sit sideways on your lap for dressing. Move the child closer to your trunk as support is needed or toward your knees as balance improves. Your hand placed on the small of the child's back will provide additional support if needed.

To further enhance balance, move your legs slowly side to side or gently bounce them up and down. The child will make adjustments as necessary to stay upright.

Having the child sit on a small stool or chair is another good position for dressing. The child should push arms into sleeves as you offer a small amount of resistance. Do the same with the legs.

Feeding

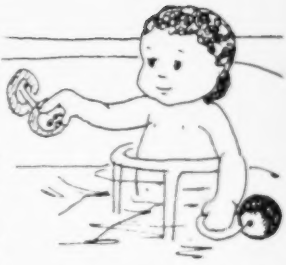
During feeding, the child should be in an upright or half-upright position. The head should be well supported if control is not present. Avoid feeding with the child lying flat or with the chin tilted back as this may cause swallowing problems.

A variety of bottles and nipples is available today which can help improve the child's ability to get nutrition. If the child keeps mouth open, the tongue protruded, or shows a weak suck when feeding, professional assistance may be required.

Place the infant's hands on the bottle to encourage keeping hands in front and promote holding of the bottle. Bottle holders may be useful and four-ounce plastic bottles are often easier to handle.

When feeding by spoon, approach the child's mouth from a slightly lower position. This will help keep the chin tucked and promote easier swallowing. Encourage the child to come forward toward the nipple or spoon.

Bathing



Water is a good medium for developing strength as it offers resistance to arm and leg movement.

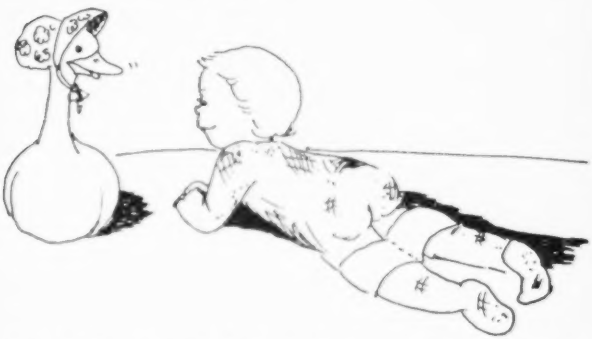
Safety should be a primary concern when bathing the child. Use towels, tub stickers, or a suction ring (such as the Baby Sitter) to provide stability. Maintain constant support if you have any doubts about sitting balance.

Encourage water play such as kicking and splashing. Use toys designed for the bathtub such as sponge animals and foam soap.

Vigorous washing with a washcloth and drying with a terrycloth towel helps stimulate muscle tone and improves the child's tolerance to touch.

Miscellaneous

Encourage reaching by placing toys or other objects at arm's length. This discourages the child's tendency to self-stimulating type of behaviors that occur when toys are kept close to the face for play.



Sew the inner seams of pajama legs together or pin a diaper around the legs to help hold child's legs together while sleeping. Tubing material, available at fabric stores, can be sewn down the middle and slipped over the legs.

When choosing a stroller, select one with a solid seat and back. Use supports along the sides and back to maintain good alignment. If an umbrella stroller is used, place a firm pillow or piece of foam along the back to prevent rounding.

Manufacturers

A-Plus (The Baby Sitter – suction tub ring)
P.O. Box 2975
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

Goldbug (Baby Head Support – Infant seat insert)
2151 W. 56th Ave.
Denver, CO 80221

Tailored Baby, Inc. (Foam Safety Sitter – Seat Support Harness)
San Fernando, CA 91340

U.S. Moms (Baby's Cloud – Infant seat insert)
P.O. Box 1626
Lunenburg, MA 01462

Notes or Other Resources

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